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SUBJECT: RECTOR: CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS CHANGE THE FACE OF
BOGAZICI UNIVERSITY

REF: ANKARA 1451

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Bogazici University rector Kadri Ozcaldiran provided Consul General with a bleak prospect for the future of what was once Turkey,s premier small university. The conversation occurred against a backdrop of high media coverage of Ozcaldiran,s unique approach to enforcing a ban on headscarves in the university. The rector explained the ban,s greater significance as Turkey,s Higher Education Board (YOK) reacts to demographic pressures from Anatolia and increases Bogazici,s enrollment; YOK,s detrimental impact on the character of both Bogazici University and Middle East Technical University; and the small but noticeable number of students who hold negative opinions of the United States and therefore choose not to pursue graduate studies in the U.S. End Summary.

A Focus on Bogazici University,s American Heritage

12. (U) Prior to its nationalization in 1971, Bogazici University was Robert College, a private American missionary school founded in 1863 and reputedly the first American school abroad. In the 1970s, Robert College became a state university and established itself as an academically prestigious school that carried on the Western academic traditions of Robert College. It currently has 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Bogazici has multiple relationships with universities in the United States but, Ozcaldiran explains, the faculty would like to establish long-lasting ties with a prestigious university such as Yale or Harvard. In addition to institutional ties, Ozcaldiran said he wants to create a center publicizing Bogazici,s U.S. heritage, drawing on the resources of Robert College,s archives stored at Columbia University. The Consul General pledged to help with this project where possible and offered to invite two or three Political Science students to the Consulate General,s election watch event on November 5.

Politicized Rectorship Appointment

13. (U) President Gul named Ozcaldiran as rector on August 5 during an appointment process heavily criticized by the media as overtly partisan. Rectors are appointed through a three-phase system, with each university's faculty voting for six top candidates, who are then submitted to Turkey's Higher Education Board (YOK). YOK submits a short-list to the president composed of any three of the top six names; the president may appoint any of these three as rector. This year, 12 of the 21 new rectors had received the highest number of peer votes in the first stage. Gul selected

Ozcaldiran, Bogazici University's top candidate in the peer election, over the second vote-getter Ayse Soysal despite Soysal's support for lifting the headscarf ban (Reftel). Soysal was one of only two sitting rectors eligible for a second term who did not win the peer elections.

Liberal Approach to Headscarf Ban Enforcement

14. (C) Citing Bogazici's liberal past, Ozcaldiran instituted a system in early September in which students and professors were provided the opportunity to sign a declaration of understanding about current regulations regarding the headscarf. Individuals who signed such a declaration were permitted to wear headscarves as they had acknowledged their responsibilities. As Rector, he explained, "I can let them in with their symbols as long as the individual understands the repercussions." According to Ozcaldiran, the Supreme Court ruling on headscarves is the law and he contended he is not responsible for questioning the legitimacy of such a law, only to respect it. Personally, he noted, "I couldn't care less. If she is over 18, anything goes." He now acknowledged that it was a mistake to think that his approach would be understood and not politicized in light of the sensitive political environment in Turkey.

How Covered is the University? A Question of Demographics

15. (SBU) Ozcaldiran admitted that he did not have an accurate count of the number of students who do or would

ISTANBUL 00000535 002 OF 002

cover their heads at Bogazici. To estimate, Ozcaldiran showed the Consul General a spreadsheet and graphs portraying the number of students in each department from Anatolia compared to the number from urban centers. He conjectured that the number of students who wear headscarves is roughly equivalent to the number of female Anatolian students. Ozcaldiran estimates that nearly 70 percent of female students in the education department would wear the headscarf as these students are largely from Anatolia. Of the female engineering students, 50 percent would wear headscarves. He noted that many engineering students come from high schools established by the "Gulen movement." Conversely, only five to six percent of female physical and social science students might wear headscarves because they largely come from wealthier families and urban centers, Ozcaldiran explained. Despite these geographic and philosophical differences, he maintained that the students mix well socially.

16. (SBU) Ozcaldiran explained his understanding of the motivation of young women who wear headscarves. He said that the majority of covered women cover for their own beliefs, not because of family pressure or to make a singularly political statement. According to Ozcaldiran, Islam cannot be separated from its political nature, comparing its influence on daily life to that of Christianity 600 years ago.

A New Research University? The Future of Bogazici University

17. (SBU) Considering his recent appointment, the Consul General asked what plans Ozcaldiran had for the university in his new capacity. Acknowledging that its "glory days as a liberal arts college" are over and facing the reality of significant increases in the student population, he said he plans to make Bogazici a research university. "Bogazici is now just one of 150 branches of a national university" centrally controlled by YOK, he said. YOK enrolled 10 percent more students for this academic year, and Ozcaldiran related that the YOK director told him to expect even more students next year. He said that national demographics force YOK to increase the number of accepted students, and subsequently decrease the quality of education. Additionally, he

explained that YOK controls the selection of research and teaching assistants and he anticipates it will soon select assistant professors. If YOK continues to operate as it does now, "state schools will suffer from poor quality education and the privately-funded schools will offer higher quality schooling."

¶18. (SBU) According to Ozcaldiran, designation with a special status is the only way to "save" the university. He suggested allying Bogazici with the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, established in 1959 to bring American teaching methods to Turkey. Ozcalidran expressed his hope that a special status would make these two universities exempt from the requirements foisted upon other public universities.

¶19. (SBU) Comment: Facing demographic pressures to increase university enrollment across the country, YOK is enrolling more Anatolian students in urban center universities as more Anatolian students receive high enough scores in the university entrance exam to win placement in those universities. Rector Ozcaldiran acknowledged that demographic pressures result in more than just more headscarves on campus. More significantly, the quality of education will decline as student numbers increase. Even if Bogazici is unable to obtain a specialized status within the national education system, it will have to rely on ties with prestigious American institutions of higher education to distinguish the quality of education and worldview of its students. End Comment.

WIENER